

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) this week introduced legislation that will allow communities to make better use of lands that are part of military base closures.

At the heart of the legislation is the no-cost Economic Development Conveyance, or no-cost EDC. This tool, which transfers land to local control at no expense, was once the primary means of property conveyance following a base closure. However, the process is now only available at the discretion of the Secretary of Defense and has not been used for years.

Following the introduction of the Defense Communities Assistance Act (H.R. 2295), Rep. Farr said:

"Taxpayers have already forfeited these lands so bases could be built. Then, they subsidized the construction of the installations. Today, we're paying even more to have bases scrubbed of toxic and hazardous waste. But rather than offering these lands to communities that desperately need economic development, the Department of Defense wants to squeeze more money by demanding communities pay once more for the land."

The legislation -- cosponsored by Kay Granger (R-Texas), Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) and William Delahunt (D-Mass.) -- includes several other provisions to enhance cooperation between communities and DoD.

Additional provisions include:

- DoD may swap excess property for other land or construction services to avoid encroachment at active military bases.
- A 10-year extension for military agencies to contract with local governments for municipal services on installations.
- DoD must reimburse states for their mandatory oversight of base cleanup activities.
- Clarifies that costs associated with toxic and hazardous cleanup are the responsibility of the DoD.

"We've gone through this process with Fort Ord, where we were lucky enough to secure a no-cost EDC," Rep. Farr said. "We know what works and what doesn't work, and to expect communities to foot the bill for these lands is illogical. We must ensure the no-cost EDC is available to all communities who face this process."

The bill will have limited impact on Fort Ord but is a vital issue for dozens of communities nationwide that have requested a no-cost EDC but have been denied. Rep. Farr's office is also negotiating with House leaders to include the bill in the FY 2010 Defense Authorization Act.

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